

Is There Anyone Left?

This past January, I was in the midst of a group of solid waste managers from around the country, listening as a representative of Browning-Ferris (BFI) expressed concerns amazingly similar to many of those around the room regarding the impacts of consolidation on the industry. I was particularly struck by his assertion of the company's commitment to a policy that put customer service first, as the basis upon which business success depended. "Amen," I thought, reflecting on the notion that a company with that attitude would make a fierce competitor for anyone. It was therefore with some surprise that I read of BFI's imminent purchase by Allied Waste Industries--soon to become the second mightiest of the vertically integrated brigade after the Justice Department once more casts its blind eye in the direction of a federally supported waste oligopoly.

It's not that I think that consolidation is bad--at least not necessarily so--but I do rue the loss of competition, just as I fear for the future of valuable public-private relationships that have been established between BFI and many municipalities over the decades. According to BFI President and CEO Bruce E. Ranck, "The merger of these two companies provides financial and contractual considerations that protect and reward our shareholders and our employees." Intentional or not, it is the exclusion of the public interest from the named "rewardees" that gets my attention, and could be the significant point in the future.

I have to admit to harboring a deep-seated belief over the years that BFI was cut from different cloth than it's competitors--the Avis #2, "We try harder" bunch doing battle with the industry's version of "Big Blue"--so it is with a sense of loss that I watch its familiar logo consigned to an occasional spot on the History Channel. It makes no difference to the banking system whether revenues from municipalities around the nation go to Houston, TX or Scottsdale, AZ, but only time will tell in what shape the "We try harder" attitude weathers its westward migration.

Are you affected by the Allied/BFI merger? Do you have thoughts on the matter. Please share them with us by phone to (805) 681-1300 or email to editor@forester.net.

New Editorial Advisory Board Members

All of us at MSW Management take great pleasure in welcoming two new members to our Editorial Advisory Board.

Wayman J. Pearson

Wayman J. Pearson is currently the Key Business Executive for the City of Charlotte's (NC) Solid Waste Services Department. Prior to accepting his present position in April 1990, he was the solid waste manager for the City of Clearwater, FL. In this capacity, he supervised the city's transition from a manual to fully automated collection system.

With more than 25 years experience in the industry, Pearson is a leader in collection techniques and systems and has received widespread recognition for his leadership in managed competition and team building.

In 1997, he helped develop Charlotte's special accounting unit that allowed city crews to become the lowest responsible bidder for the award of a service contract. He has applied this experience in helping other communities evaluate the competitiveness of their current collection service delivery activities.

James D. Warner

As Executive Director since October 1996, Jim Warner directs all activities for the Lancaster County (PA) Solid Waste Management Authority, including operations, planning, finance, recycling, engineering, and construction. With an annual operating budget exceeding \$53 million and assets in excess of \$200 million, the system managed over 580,000 tons of waste in 1998. The Authority's waste system includes a 1,200 tpd mass-burn resource recovery facility, a 96-ac. double-lined landfill, a 1,500 tpd transfer station, and a permanent HHW facility.

Recently, Warner forged a successful financial turnaround of the authority by substantially increasing operating revenues and tonnage while aggressively reducing operating costs. In February of 1998, he concluded a year-long effort in leading the authority through a refunding of \$150 million of debt with a savings outcome of over \$25 million. In recognition of these successes, the Authority received SWANA's Excellence Gold Award in Planning and Financial Management at WASTECON in Charlotte, NC in October 1998.